

At 16, a world of opportunities for Stony Brook ballerina Ballet has been a lifelong dream and now dancer will visit Russia to study

BY JESSICA GRUNENBERG

Ever since 16-year-old Anna Craddock watched the animated movie, "Barbie in the Nutcracker," nearly a decade ago, she knew she wanted to be a ballerina.

At 14, Craddock performed the principal role of Sugar Plum Fairy in Seiskaya Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker" and this summer, dancing will take her across the world to the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow, Russia.

"Every time I dance this passion comes from within me, and by performing, I get to share it with everyone," Craddock said

in a phone interview.

Craddock, a Stony Brook resident entering her senior year at Ward Melville High School, was one of 15 students accepted into the National Security Language Initiative for Youth summer program in Russia, which begins July 14. NSLI-Y was founded in 2006 and pays for high school students to travel abroad to increase Americans' abilities to communicate in foreign languages and understand foreign cultures.

"I was pretty ecstatic when I found out I was chosen and I was so excited that they see potential in me to learn and study abroad," Craddock said.

Rina Kirshner, vice president of the Russian American Foundation,

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said her organization partnered with NSLI-Y to create a six-week summer program for high school students that combines Russian

language study with ballet training at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy.

"The Russian American Foundation mission is to build a bridge between the two countries and their people," Kirshner said in a phone interview.

She said the partnership — which started three years ago — between the NSLI-Y and the Russian American Foundation was inevitable, since the foundation had successfully brought Russian teachers from the Bolshoi Ballet Academy to New York City to teach ballet

and Russian language to aspiring dancers for the past five summers.

Craddock spent three weeks last summer studying with teachers from the academy in New York City, which is where she first learned about the travel program.

However, Craddock injured herself during a rigorous class last August, fracturing three bones and tearing two ligaments in her right foot.

"I really questioned whether or not I would ever be able to dance again," she said.

After two-and-a-half months, Craddock was able to get off crutches and slowly begin her return to ballet.

Her mother, Michelle Craddock, said the injury put everything into perspective for her daughter.

"Now she is dancing for herself again and enjoying every minute," she said.

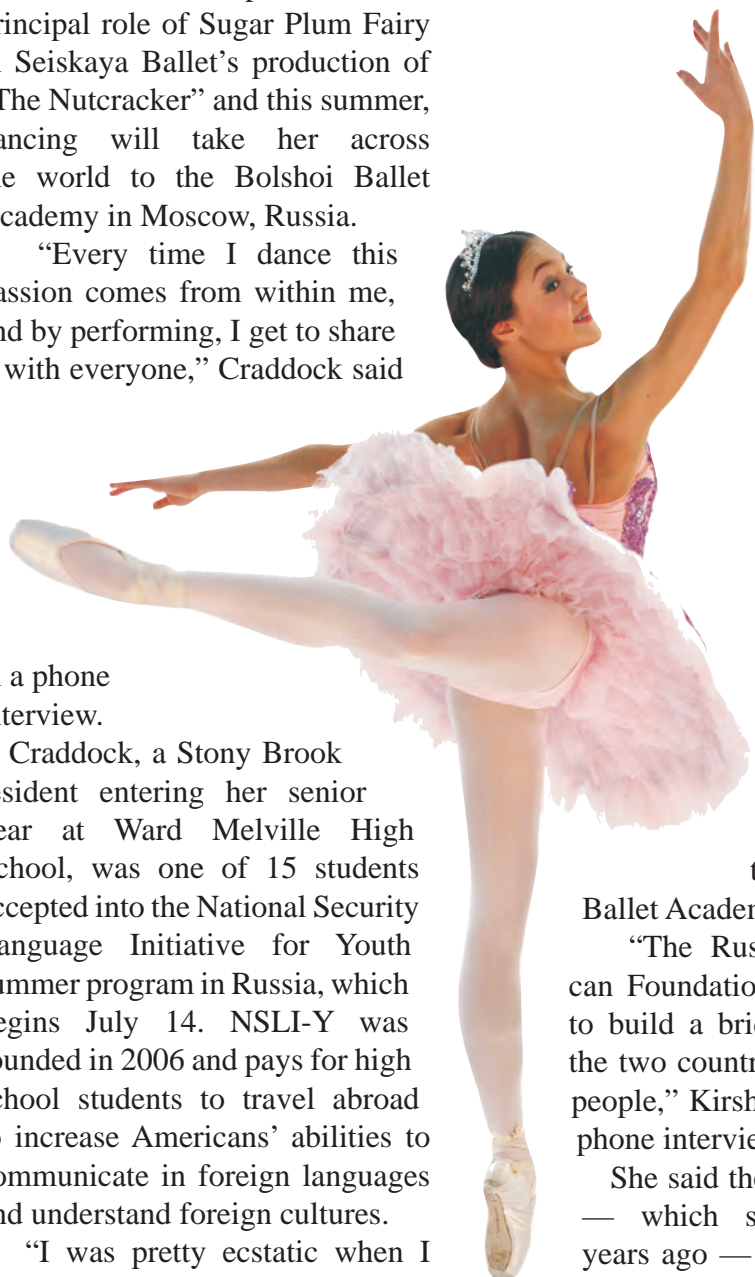
Craddock will stay in dorms at the Russian academy and receive four hours of language study and three hours of ballet training five days a week. On weekends, she will stay with a host family and explore the city of Moscow.

"They are taking us to see cathedrals, museums, and we get to see a ballet performance," she said.

This will be Craddock's second trip abroad. She competed in the

Anna Craddock performs as "Kitri" in a production of "Don Quixote," right, and as the Sugar Plum Fairy in "The Nutcracker," left.

Photos from Dimitri Papadakos



Hellas International Dance Competition in Greece in 2009, receiving first place in her age division.

Dimitri Papadakos, administrative director of Seiskaya Ballet in St. James where Craddock has trained since she started dancing, said Craddock has a way of connecting with the audience when she performs.

"When you see her dance she really communicates with everyone in the audience, whether they are in the first row or the back row," Papadakos said. "That's what makes her so magnetic; it's not only being good, but being able to connect with everybody."

Valia Seiskaya, Craddock's main teacher, said she believes the trip will help Craddock continue to improve as a dancer.

"Nothing can stop her if she loves it and works on [it] and she just gets better and better," Seiskaya said.